



Testimony submitted December 5, 2009 for

## Speaker Donovan's Task Force on Children in the Recession

**Latasha Fitzwilliams, Unemployed Youth**

Submitted by the Community Renewal Team, Inc.

Good morning, my name is Latasha Fitzwilliams. I'm a Hartford resident; I just turned 20 a few months ago. Thank you for the chance to speak with you this morning.

I want to give you a picture of how this economy can knock out an entire family. A really hard working family. I have a mom who is sick and a step-dad who lost his job. My older brother and sister had good jobs and their own apartments, but their hours have been cut. My twin and my younger brother are looking for work. In our fridge right now, there's about two things – a half bottle of juice and a box of eggs. The tension in our house is bad. I stay away as much as I can.

But I should start with my own story. I have completed two programs in cooking and I have five different certifications. Even so, I apply for five to six jobs a day without even getting an interview.

I have always loved to cook, and I'm a really fast learner. I studied culinary in high school, and in my sophomore year I already had a job on the grill at a busy restaurant.

In my senior year at Hartford High School I was taking honors classes and applying for college. I pictured myself opening a food truck and then going on to have a restaurant of my own someday. But financial aide didn't cover enough of the cost. Since my mom is really sick, she couldn't help me with the tuition.

That's when I decided to go to the Job Corps up in Chicopee, Mass, where they have a culinary program. I moved through it really fast, because I already knew a lot of the skills. The program



helped me prepare a resume and set up interviews with all kinds of employers. But when I finished in June of this year, I didn't have a single good lead.

I wasn't picky. I would have taken anything, from fast food to a low level job in a five-star restaurant. But no one was hiring. Or they want someone with more experience.

I would take anything. This summer I worked in the garage of a bus company. My supervisors really liked me, wanted to hire me. But they said that they didn't have the money to create a position for me. I got great evaluations, but they're sitting in a file somewhere.

I started a third shift job, moving files from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. I was really happy to have it. But they didn't tell me it was temporary, so in two weeks they ran out of work.

Right now I'm working with Community Renewal Team's youth employment program. My case manager says that we'll find a manager who can see the great training that I've had, not just the work experience that I haven't had.

This economy is knocking everyone. If you can find a job – even a seasonal one for the holidays – you don't get decent hours. When my sister started with K-Mart they said that they really needed help. But for this whole last week, they only brought her in for one day.

I really don't know what families like mine are supposed to do. Sometime I say to a friend, 'OK, what can we do to get some quick money.' I know the answer to that question. But I don't want to go there. I don't want to throw everything away. But I think about it, believe me, I think about it.

Thank you for your time.

**Community Renewal Team, Inc.**

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